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## OPENING: Erich Woll displays new conceptual work in solo exhibit in Seattle

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Erich Woll, *In My Neck of the Woods*, 2013.  
Glass, acrylic, and steel. H 36, W 45, D 5.  
photo: russell johnson.

**Winston Wächter Fine Art, Inc.**

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Erich Woll's first solo exhibition, entitled "When Things Go South," will open on September 10, 2013 at [Winston Wachter Fine Art](#) in Seattle. The exhibition features six of Woll's newest pieces, many of which are conceptual embodiments of aphorisms, or sayings. The show title itself serves as a thematic umbrella of various riffs on the idea of "when things go wrong." In fact, the title is mildly subversive. "My first solo exhibition is titled in part 'when things go wrong' when things are actually going well [for me]," said Woll in a telephone interview with the *GLASS Quarterly Hot Sheet*.

Woll has used his strong background in traditional technique to new purpose. His newest works undertake a conceptual approach, in which he embraces complex ideologies and commentaries on contemporary culture. Woll has also enlarged his scale from past projects—like his creations of glass squirrels and beetles, for instance—working in the installation format for some works. One new piece, titled *In My Neck of the Woods* (2013), consists of five three-foot long glass matchsticks. When viewed from left to right, the matchsticks successively become more burnt.

"The title, from my standpoint, is kind of humorous," Woll explained about the piece. "[ 'In my neck of the woods' ] is used by individuals to identify where they come from, yet, it is such an ambiguous, broad phrase that I find some dry humor in. It's such a benign term— what does it even mean? Yet, to the individual, it means a great deal. They're trying to explain their physical idiosyncrasies that put them in a group. It's a means of identification. No one can truly understand where someone comes from or what their experiences are like. It's an elusive term—hence the matchsticks. Visually, the matchsticks can mean any number of different things."

Woll plays with the various interpretations that can arise from his new pieces, and he believes his viewers' interpretations are as valid as his own.

"I try to leave doors and windows open from a conceptual standpoint to allow viewers to have their own ideas about the pieces," Woll said. "Each piece has very specific meaning, but I really enjoy how others interpret what can be rather enigmatic work."



In the gallery, some of Woll's pieces are labeled with their titles, which help guide the viewer into a general conceptual framework. Some are not, which grant the viewer the ability to decipher meaning. Another method Woll uses to evoke meaning is by reproducing very identifiable objects in glass—such as burnt matchsticks, or, in another piece, stacked black and white dominoes—and then taking them out of their typical context.

"The viewer will realize that they're not seeing these things as they normally would," Woll said. "I hope they ask the question: what context are they in and what is trying to be said here? That gives people a jump-start."

In another piece, "Your Secret is Safe with Me," Woll inkjet-printed binary code on a 7-by-9-foot piece of paper. There are 21 1's and 0's, which collectively spell out the words "your secret is safe with me." The sculpture alludes to "the unprotectability of the internet" or the difficulty of protecting one's personal identity, especially amongst government activity in cyberspace. In front of the binary code, Woll placed three water-filled Veronese vases. The vases magnify the 1's and 0's behind them, which, he believes, act like the zooming-in of a double click mouse.

"I think of myself as a data miner of some sorts," Woll explained. "There is so much information presented to us, it's hard to ignore. It's right at our fingertips. I try to take everyday information and try to look at it a different way."

Woll also includes a short video titled "All Good Things Must Come to an End" in the show. It depicts him grinding a clear [Verdi](#) [Requiem](#) by Italian Romantic composer [Giuseppe Verdi](#) plays in sync with the video, which, according to Woll, is "very melancholic. There fits of joy and moments of despair. It adds life and also death to a visually methodical process."

This grinding process displayed in the video, Woll says, "is like watching cheese age or paint dry. The act of grinding the vase away to nothing is very simplistic, yet conceptually very strong, especially in the craft of glass."



Though the video is largely interpretative, Woll claims that “maybe it refers to the loss of crafts and trades, how traditional ones are being lost or rendered obsolete by modernity. It could refer to the cycle of life as well. You work to create something your whole life only to be reduced to dust.”

Woll studied glass at [Alfred University](#). He later joined the teams of [Dale Chihuly](#) and [Lino Tagliapietra](#) and has worked at the [Pilchuck Glass School](#), [Pratt Fine Arts Center](#) in Seattle, and [The Museum of Glass](#) in Tacoma, Washington.

When asked how he developed this conceptual approach to glass, Woll said, “Learning the craft [of glass] is quite important, so in working with Chihuly for 6 years and working for Lino for 11 years and other artists, I gained a skill set. What was crucial for me was that I had things to say. I wanted my work to say something. I didn’t want it to be just be some “vessular” [Woll’s term for work in the vessel tradition] thing that is just pretty eye-candy . I think, overall, at the beginning of the American glass movement, because glass is such a different material to master, it was quite acceptable for the craft to be vessular-based or based on techniques developed in Venice or the Czech Republic. It was crucial for that first generation to make that sort of hands-on “vessular” work and to take the baby steps from the craft to something more. So, subsequent generations are stepping further out into more conceptually-based work and less of the craft-based work, just expanding the horizons of the American glass movement, lifting that craft’s ceiling to something more—lifting it to a conceptual level in line with a lot of other artistic media.”